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LATIN AMERICA WEEKLY REVIEW

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The decision to keep Videla in office and to separate the presidency from the junta has only papered over a longstanding dispute; a period of intense maneuvering probably lies ahead before the military resolves the issue of presidential powers.

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This publication is prepared for regional specialists in the Washington community by the Latin America Division, Office of Regional and Political Analysis, with occasional contributions from other offices within the National Foreign Assessment Center and from other agencies within the Intelligence Community. Comments and queries are welcome. They should be directed to the authors of the individual articles.

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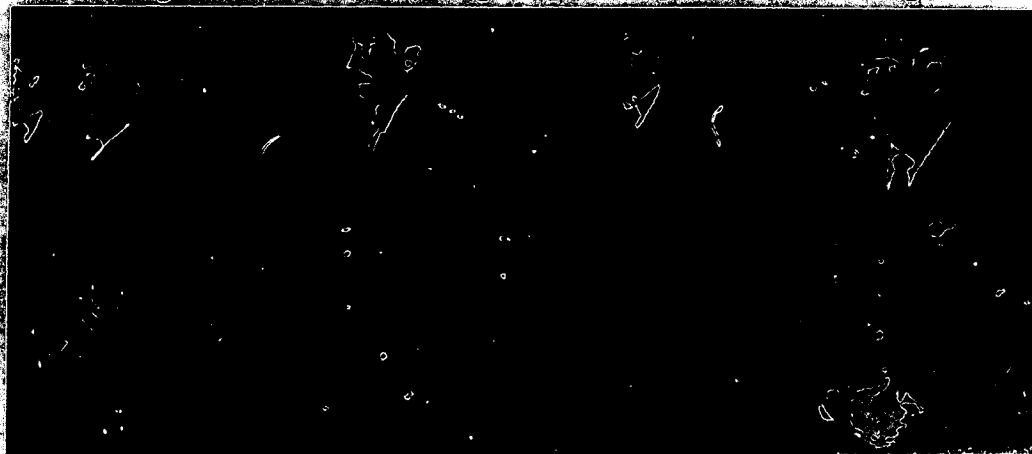
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Argentina: President Videla's Term Extended

The decision by Argentina's ruling junta to extend President Videla's term and to separate the office of the presidency from the junta has temporarily papered over a longstanding dispute regarding the organization of the government. The move leaves unexplained the role of the president and probably presages a period of intense maneuvering within the military.

The governing junta announced last week that Videla, Commander in Chief of the Army, will retire from active duty by 1 August, but will remain as chief executive until March 1981. Technically, Videla will thus serve as a "civilian" president, although his constituency will clearly be the military. By the fall of this year, the Navy and Air Force members of the junta are also slated to retire and be replaced.

The announcement left unclear, however, the crucial question of whether the office of the presidency will be subordinate to or independent of the junta. Videla wants to strengthen the office by expanding its authority to



President Videla flanked by junta members Admiral Massera (l) and
Air Force General Agosti (r)

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legislate, but he has been consistently opposed by junta member Admiral Massera, Commander of the Navy. The issue had been hotly debated for well over a year, and Massera's intransigence is perhaps the main reason the decision on Videla's presidency was so long in coming.

The politically ambitious Massera has been strongly critical of the tone and style of Videla's leadership. Massera has used his position in the junta and his popularity within the Navy not only to block Videla's initiatives but also to generate opposition both in and out of the Navy.

Since junta actions require a unanimous vote, the decision may have involved some conciliatory gestures toward Massera. He may have been promised, for example, some alteration in the government's economic policy, of which he has been a strong and vocal critic. The Admiral may simply have been obliged to go along, however, when it finally became obvious that the Air Force, which he had hoped to rally to his side, would vote with the Army.

Nevertheless, the issue is far from settled. The legislative powers of the president have not been spelled out, and his relationship to the junta with regard to military matters is also still in dispute. Massera and other opponents of Videla probably do not have the power to undo the changes already made, but they could hamper the effectiveness of a revamped presidency. [REDACTED]

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~~SECRET~~Human Rights Developments

The Argentine Government has apparently decided that conditions no longer justify giving the security forces free rein.

In a speech at a national police conference last week, Interior Minister General Harguindeguy declared that emergency measures had almost completely eradicated subversion and that it was therefore no longer necessary or advisable for the police to remain under the direct operational control of the various military commands. Presumably acting under the direction of President Videla or the military junta, Harguindeguy has also issued instructions to the police to stop bullying the public and to restore normal police procedures.

These moves suggest that Harguindeguy, one of Argentina's toughest and most conservative Army generals, has adopted a more moderate posture, at least with regard to counterterrorist tactics. In the past, these operations were often directed against political leaders and other civilians not connected with subversive organizations or activities.

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